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ARTICLE V.

ON

THE MAIN RESULTS

OF THE LATER

VEDIC RESEARCHES IN GERMANY.

BY

WILLIAM D. WHITNEY.

(Read October 13, 1852.)

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VEDIC RESEARCHES IN GERMANY.

It is a truth now well established, that the Vedas furnish the only sure foundation on which a knowledge of ancient and modern India can be built up. They are therefore at present engrossing the larger share of the attention of those who pursue this branch of Oriental study. Only recently, however, has their paramount importance been fully recognized: it was by slow degrees that they made their way up to the consideration in which they are now held. Once it was questioned whether any such books as the Vedas really existed, or whether, if they did exist, the jealous care of the Brahmans would ever allow them to be laid open to European eyes. This doubt dispelled, they were first introduced to the near acquaintance of scholars in the West by Colebrooke. His famous Essay on the Vedas appeared in the Asiatic Researches for 1805 (vol. viii.), and, owing to his very extensive library of manuscripts, and that rare command of the language which he possessed, and which enabled him to make a more or less thorough examination of nearly all of them, it presented such a general view of the whole body of Vedic literature as has not even yet been superseded. His comprehension of the subject, however, was in some respects essentially defective. He was unable to classify properly the great mass of writings which he had before him; to hold distinctly apart, and view in their true mutual relation, the four original texts and the liturgical and other works which had grouped themselves about them; and having looked at the contents of the former through the distorting medium of the native interpretation, he had

failed to perceive what striking results, for every department of Indian antiquity, they were in a condition to furnish. Accordingly, his paper, instead of winding up with an exhortation to pursue diligently the path he had pointed out, and a promise of the abundant fruit to be gained by the conquest of the many difficulties that lay in the way, closed with the rather discouraging remark that the Vedas contained much that was interesting, and were well worthy the occasional attention of the Oriental student, but that their mass and the obscure dialect in which they were composed would probably long prevent the mastery of their contents. This prophecy was doubtless in some measure the cause of its own fulfillment: at any rate, many years did elapse before the next step was taken; and this time it was a German, Friedrich Rosen, Professor in the London University, who laid his hand anew to the work: his access to the great collections of Sanskrit manuscripts deposited in London had given him opportunity to learn the true value of the Vedas, and to perceive the high necessity of laying them open to the examination of European science. His Rig-Vedæ Specimen saw the light in 1830, and was followed, eight years later, by the publication of the first Ashṭaka, or eighth, of the same Veda: the Sanskrit text, accompanied by a Latin translation and notes; the latter incomplete, for he who should have finished them was already in his grave; a fatal interruption to the progress of this study, which had been recommenced so promisingly. For there was no one to take up again the thread where he had dropped it; and so another intermission of some years followed, during which the material already made public was elaborated more by the linguists than by the students of Indian antiquity: for the latter, it was still too much a fragment to be able to afford any very satisfactory results. The next publication of importance was Prof. Roth's Contributions to the History and Literature of the Veda, and appeared in 1846. He had spent some time at the French and English libraries, in a thorough examination, particularly, of the principal Veda, the Ṛik; and this little work of his, with other similar essays which accompanied or followed it, gave perhaps the most powerful impulse to that movement which has since carried all Sanskritists irresistibly to the study of the Vedas. About this time, too, a valuable collection of manuscripts

had been purchased for the Royal Library in Berlin, and with the material thus placed within the easier reach of German science and industry, the work went on more rapidly. Dr. Weber's Vâjasaneyi-Sanhitæ Specimen appeared in 1845, soon followed by the commencement of an edition of the text of that Veda (the White Yajus), which has just now reached its completion. In 1848, Benfey published the Sâma-Veda, entire, with translation and glossary. A new edition of the Ṛik, too, with accented text and the native commentary, is now in progress at London; but many years must elapse before the whole text of this most important of the Vedas can be laid before us. The Atharva-Veda, the most comprehensive and valuable of the four collections, next after the Ṛik, lies still buried in the manuscripts, nor is there any immediate prospect of its publication. The whole study, then, being still so new, its material in so small part, and that so recently, made public, it is only those who having long had access to libraries of manuscripts have devoted to the subject their special attention, who can speak with authority, and from the results of original investigations, upon matters connected with the Vedas. To this, of course, I can lay no claim; the secondary advantage, however, of being placed under the personal instruction of persons thus qualified, I have enjoyed, having been fortunate enough to hear, during the past year and a half, the lectures of Prof. Roth in Tübingen, and of Dr. Weber in Berlin; scholars who, each in his own department of Vedic research, are, to say the least, not surpassed in Europe. To them will be due whatever the following paper may contain of interest or value; and I desire to make, at the outset, this general expression of my indebtedness to them, in lieu of particular acknowledgments from time to time in the course of the essay; without, however, at the same time rendering them accountable for what errors and imperfections may be found in the latter: these will be due to, and I trust partially excused by, the impossibility of gaining, in so short a period, full command of so great a subject. Completeness, indeed, in any respect, is not pretended to here: it is sought only to give such a general statement of the main results of the later Vedic researches in Germany as shall serve to introduce the subject to those to whom it may be unknown, and awaken, if possible, in some measure, that interest for it to which it is so justly entitled.

It will be in order first to name and describe the writings which are to be understood by the appellation "Veda," in the course of this paper. The word is one of varied application. Its original signification is simply "knowledge, science." It is then made to denote the whole body of the Hindû sacred literature, as containing eminently *the* science: as teaching that knowledge which, of all others, is best worth acquiring. This is not the sense in which it will be now employed. A discussion of this immense body of literary records, which extends itself over the whole religious and philosophical history of the Hindû people, is not what is here called for. We shall concern ourselves with but a single department of it. It is, namely, by the Indians themselves, divided into two grand portions, *mantra* and *brâhmaṇa* (which words we may render, though not literally, by the terms "worship" and "theology"); and this division, as is not always the case with one of native origin, is in fact an essential one, separating two widely different classes of writings, which stand related to one another as canonized text on the one hand, and canonized explication, dogmatical, exegetical, historical, prescriptive, on the other; which, in the main, are widely removed in time, and represent two distinct periods of religious development; and of which the one is in verse, the other in prose. The second, *brâhmaṇa,* is made up of the various single works which also bear the name of *brâhmaṇa* (as the Aitareya and Kaushîtaki Brâhmaṇas, which attach themselves to the Ṛig-Veda; the Çatapatha Brâhmaṇa, belonging to the Yajus, etc.); and other kindred writings, such as the Âraṇyakas, works prepared for the edification of those who had withdrawn themselves into the forest for seclusion and meditation, and Upanishads, lesser theological treatises. The first portion, *mantra,* consists of the four works commonly known as Ṛig-Veda, Sâma-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Atharva-Veda, and to these alone, the Vedas, in contradistinction to the Veda, will our attention at present be directed. They form together a peculiar class of writings, standing at the head of the whole body of Indian literature, agreeing with one another in the grand external characteristics of form and language, and in the general nature of their contents, and even all of them composed, in part, of the same matter; in other respects, such as internal arrangement, date and object of collection, and use in the ceremo-

nial of the Indian religion, of a widely different character. Those features which are common to them all will naturally be the first to be illustrated.

The general form of the Vedas is that of lyrical poetry: they contain the songs in which the first ancestors of the Hindû people, at the very dawn of their existence as a separate nation, while they were still only on the threshold of the great country which they were afterwards to fill with their civilization, praised the gods, extolled heroic deeds, and sang of other matters which kindled their poetical fervor. This of itself were enough to attach a high and universal interest to these books, that as, in point of time also, they are probably the most ancient existing literary records of our race, so, at any rate in the progression of literary development, they are beyond dispute the earliest we possess: the most complete representation which has been preserved to modern times of that primitive lyrical epoch which theory assumes as the earliest in the literary history of every people. The mass as it lies before us is almost exclusively of a religious character; this may have its ground partly in the end for which the collections were afterward made, but is probably in a far higher degree due to the character of the people itself, which thus shows itself to have been at the beginning what it continued to be throughout its whole history, an essentially religious one: for no great people, surely, ever presented the spectacle of a development more predominantly religious; none ever grounded its whole fabric of social and political life more absolutely on a religious basis; none ever meditated more deeply and exclusively on things supernatural; none ever rose, on the one hand, higher into the airy regions of a purely speculative creed, or sunk, on the other, deeper into degrading superstitions, the two extremes to which such a tendency naturally leads. Hymns of a very different character are not entirely wanting, and this might be taken as an indication that, had they been more numerous, more would have been preserved to us: such, however, form but rare exceptions in the great body of religious poetry. Even passages which afford historical or geographical data, are infrequent, and notwithstanding the great mass of the text, the harvest of such information to be gleaned from it is but a scanty one. The songs are for the most part simple invocations and extollings of the divinity

to which each is addressed: the character of the Vedic religion is too little mythical to afford opportunity for extensive variations of the theme which each god suggests, and high flights of pure poetical fancy are of uncommon occurrence; the attributes of the divinity are recounted; honorific epithets in profusion are heaped upon him; the devotion and service of his worshipper are plead, and blessings of all kinds besought in return; former kindnesses bestowed on ancestors, or friends, or the heroes of the olden time, are mentioned, and confidence expressed that favors not inferior will still be granted to the righteous. Something of monotony, of course, cannot well be avoided, and proper poetical interest of the highest order is not to be sought here. The metrical form of these lyrics is of the simplest character. Nearly all the numerous metres are variations of but a single movement, the iambic, differing from one another either in respect to the number of feet which go to make up a hemistich, and the number of the latter which compose a verse, or in the presence or absence of an added syllable which gives each hemistich a trochaic close. But farther than this, the laws regulating the succession of long and short syllables within the limits of the hemistich, are in general any thing but strict: all that is aimed at seems to be to give the whole a kind of rythmical flow, or general metrical movement, on which the four last syllables shall stamp the peculiar character: their quantity is much more definitely established, yet even among them exceptional irregularities are by no means rare.

The language of the Vedas is an older dialect, varying very considerably, both in its grammatical and lexical character, from the classical Sanskrit. Its grammatical peculiarities run through all departments: euphonic rules, word-formation and composition, declension, conjugation, syntax. Without entering into any specification of them, which would extend this paper beyond its proper limits, it will be enough to say here that they are partly such as characterize an older language, consisting in a greater originality of forms and the like, and partly such as characterize a language which is still in the bloom and vigor of life, its freedom untrammelled by other rules than those of common usage, and which has not, like the Sanskrit, passed into oblivion as a native spoken dialect, become merely a con-

ventional medium of communication among the learned, been forced, as it were, into a mould of regularity by long and exhausting grammatical treatment, and received a development which is in some respects foreign and unnatural. The dissimilarity existing between the two, in respect to the stock of words of which each is made up, is, to say the least, not less marked. Not single words alone, but whole classes of derivations, and roots, with the families that are formed from them, which the Veda exhibits in frequent and familiar use, are wholly wanting, or have left but faint traces, in the classical dialect; and this to such an extent as seems to demand, if the two be actually related to one another directly as mother and daughter, a longer interval between them than we should be inclined to assume, from the character and degree of the grammatical, and more especially the phonetic, differences. The history of the Hindû dialects and their mutual relations, however, is as yet far from being satisfactorily traced out, and it is not worth while to risk here any hasty conclusions: at any rate, the value of the Vedic dialect, for clearing up this history and establishing the true character of the Sanskrit and its successors, is not less decided than that of the Vedas themselves, for elucidating the later Indian antiquity. In many of the points in which Vedic and Sanskrit disagree, the former strikingly approaches its next neighbors to the westward, the language of the Avesta, commonly called the Zend, and that of the Persian inscriptions; and this circumstance lends it a high importance as an aid in the restoration, now so happily in process of accomplishment, of those lost treasures of antiquity. Its farther preëminent value in a general linguistic point of view, as sustaining in a less degree to the Sanskrit the same relation as the latter to the other Indo-European languages, has been long fully recognized.

Other particular characteristics of the four Vedas, and the relations in which they stand to one another, will be most clearly exhibited by giving some account of the contents and arrangement of each, separately.

First among them, in extent and importance, is the Rig-Veda. Its text, *Sanhitâ,* is composed of a little more than a thousand hymns, *sûktas;* these are of various length, from one to more than fifty verses, and comprise altogether about ten thousand five hundred such verses, or *ṛic* (*ṛic* comes

from the root *ṛic* or *arc,* "to praise," and signifies originally "a praising," but is then, by an easy and frequent transition, applied to denote the medium of praise, the stanza). From the latter it derives its name: it is the Veda of *ṛic.* Why it, as distinguished from the others, has a peculiar title to this appellation, will be made to appear hereafter. It is divided into ten books, called *Maṇḍalas,* "circles." Of these, the first seven are quite homogeneous in respect to their character and internal arrangement. The first book is considerably the longest, containing a hundred and ninety-one hymns, which are, with single scattered exceptions, ascribed to fifteen different authors or *ṛishis* (this is the technical name for the inspired author of any *ṛic;* the word means "sage, seer"), among them some of the best known names of the Vedic period, as Gotama, Kaṇva, Kutsa, Çunaḥçepa, Kakshîvan: the hymns of each *ṛishi* stand together in a body, and, with the exception of those of Agastya, the last in the book, are so arranged that those addressed to Agni come first, those to Indra succeed them, and then follow promiscuously those to other divinities. Of the next six books, each is ascribed entire to a single poet, or poetic family; the second, containing forty-three hymns, to Gṛitsamada; the third, sixty-two, to Viçvâmitra; the fourth, fifty-eight, to Vâmadeva; the fifth, eighty-seven, to Atri and ṛishis of his kindred; the sixth, seventy-five, to Bharadvâja; the seventh, one hundred and four, to Vasishṭha. In all of them, the hymns are arranged in strict accordance with the method above stated as observed in the subdivisions of the first book. Thus far, then, we seem to have a single collection, made and ordered by the same hand. With the succeeding books the case is otherwise. The eighth contains ninety-two hymns, assigned to a great number of different authors, some of whom are among those whose productions we have already found in the earlier books; a majority of them are of the race of Kaṇva; hymns of the same ṛishi do not always stand in connection together, and of any internal arrangement according to divinities there is no trace. This book has a special name: it is entitled *Pragâthâs;* the word etymologically signifies a kind of song (from the root *gai,* "to sing," and prefix *pra,* "forth" or "before"); why the hymns of this book in particular should be thus styled, does not at present appear: *pragâtha* is also

the name of a certain metre of not infrequent occurrence among them, as well as of a rishi to whom a few of them are ascribed; but neither of these circumstances gives any clue to the reason of the appellation. With the ninth book the case is clearer: its hymns, one hundred and fourteen in number, are, without exception, addressed to the Soma, and, being intended to be sung while that drink was expressed from the plant that afforded it, and was clarified, are called *pâvamânyas,* "purificational." And here, for the sake of clearness, it may be well to turn aside for a moment to consider the origin and significance of that peculiar feature of the ancient Indian religion presented in the Soma-ritual. The word *soma* means simply "extract" (from the root *su,* "to express, extract"), and is the name of a beverage prepared from a certain herb, the asclepias acida, which grows abundantly upon the mountains of India and Persia. This plant, which by its name should be akin to our common milkweed, furnishes like the latter an abundant milky juice, which, when fermented, possesses intoxicating qualities. In this circumstance, it is believed, lies the explanation of the whole matter. The simple-minded Arian people, whose whole religion was a worship of the wonderful powers and phenomena of nature, had no sooner perceived that this liquid had power to elevate the spirits, and produce a temporary frenzy, under the influence of which the individual was prompted to, and capable of, deeds beyond his natural powers, than they found in it something divine: it was, to their apprehension, a god, endowing those into whom it entered, with godlike powers; the plant which afforded it became to them the king of plants; the process of preparing it was a holy sacrifice; the instruments used therefor were sacred. The high antiquity of this cultus is attested by the references to it found occurring in the Persian Avesta; it seems, however, to have received a new impulse on Indian territory, as the *pâvamânya* hymns of the Veda exhibit it in a truly remarkable state of development. Soma is there addressed as a god in the highest strains of adulation and veneration; all powers belong to him; all blessings are besought of him, as his to bestow. And not only do such hymns compose one whole book of the Ṛik, and occur scattered here and there through other portions of it, but the most numerous single passages, and references every where

appearing, show how closely it had intertwined itself with the whole ritual of the Vedic religion. Soma is an acceptable offering to all the gods; it is, however, peculiarly the property of Indra: he sallies out to stay the demon, and free the imprisoned waters, when inspired by the draughts of this drink which are presented him by his worshippers. The transference of the name Soma to the moon, which appears in the later history of the Indian religion, is hitherto obscure: the Vedas do not know it, nor do they seem to prepare the way for it in any manner.

To return to the ninth book of the Rik: the names of its numerous authors are some of them those whose acquaintance we have already formed; a few of its hymns, as also of the pragâthas, are ascribed to mythical personages. Both the eighth and the ninth book, now, stand in a peculiar connection with the Sâma-Veda: nearly half the verses of the pâvamânyas occur again in that collection, and of the pragâthas, more than a fifth, or nearly two-thirds as many hymns as form all the other books of the Rik (excepting the ninth) taken together. This is a significant circumstance, from which may one day be drawn valuable results for the history of both collections: for the present we must be content with simply stating it. The tenth book, again, stands apart from the rest, wearing the appearance of being a later appendage to the collection. It is a very long one, comprising, like the first, a hundred and ninety-one hymns. Of these, the first half is arranged upon no apparent system; the second commences with the longer hymns, and diminishes their length regularly to the close. As to their authors, the tradition is in very many cases entirely at fault, and either assigns them to some god or mythical character, or awkwardly manufactures out of an expression occurring in one of the verses, a name to stand as that of rishi. Both these are distinctive circumstances; still more peculiar, however, is the character of a large portion of its contents. Many of its hymns, indeed, do not remarkably differ from the mass of those found in the earlier books; but as a whole they are evidently of a much later date, and conceived in another spirit. They do not restrict themselves to the devotional strain that prevails elsewhere: they embrace a far wider range of subjects; they are mythical, like the hymn of Purûravas and Urvaçî, the dialogue between Yama and Yamî, the discussion between

Agni and the other gods, when he desires to resign his office as mediator, and they dissuade him from it; speculative, as the hymn on the origin of creation, translated in Colebrooke's Essay; simply practical, as the addresses to night and to forest-solitude; superstitious, as charms and exorcisms; of an anomalous character, as the hymn in which a ruined gambler deplores his fatal passion for play, recounts the misfortunes which it has caused him, and forswears the dice. They wear, in short, the peculiar character of the fourth Veda, the Atharva, and do in fact sustain to that collection such a relation as the eighth and ninth books to the Sâma-Veda: most of them occurring again among its contents.

After this general view, it will not seem doubtful what opinion is to be held of the character of the Ṛig-Veda as a collection. Such a mass of hymns could not have been brought together, and into such a form, merely for a liturgical purpose, for use in the ceremonial of the Indian worship. In the later distribution of the Vedas, indeed, to the various classes of priests who officiate at a sacrifice, the Ṛik is assigned to the *Hotar,* or "Invoker"; but this does not suppose of necessity any thing farther than that this Veda, as the chief of the sacred books, might not be wholly left out at an act of solemn worship; or imply that any other use was made of it than is made of our own Bible, for instance, when at any religious exercise an appropriate chapter or passage from it is read. The Ṛig-Veda is doubtless a historical collection, prompted by a desire to treasure up complete, and preserve from farther corruption, those ancient and inspired songs which the Indian nation had brought with them, as their most precious possession, from the earlier seats of the race.

With the Sâma-Veda the case is otherwise: this is a purely liturgical collection. Its Sanhitâ, foundation-text, is divided into two portions. The first and smaller, the *Ârcika,* is composed of five hundred and eighty-five ric, whereof five hundred and thirty-nine are found likewise in the Ṛig-Veda; here, however, they are rent from the connection in which they stood in the hymns of which they originally formed a part (so that only in one or two instances do two follow one another in the same order as in the Ṛik), and are arranged anew into fifty-nine decades, and these again are combined into chapters and books. The first twelve decades are ad-

dressed solely to Agni; the thirty-six next following, for the most part, to Indra: single invocations of Agni and other divinities are scattered here and there among them, and a part of one of the last is addressed to Soma. Thus far the verses are taken indifferently from all the books of the Ṛik excepting the ninth (which, save in the decade last mentioned, is represented by only two verses): the extracts from the eighth, however, as already before remarked, greatly preponderating in number. The remaining eleven decades are, without exception, from the Soma-hymns of the ninth book. The second portion, called the *Staubhika* (from the root *stubh,* which likewise means "to praise"), contains twelve hundred and twenty-three ric, eleven hundred and ninety-four of them occurring also in the Ṛig-Veda; they are arranged primarily in divisions which, as a general rule (though with frequent exceptions), consist each of three verses, and are in nearly all cases connected extracts from the hymns of the Ṛik; sometimes, indeed, a whole hymn, of from four to twelve verses, forms a single division. In numerous instances, the first or one of the following verses of a division is one which has already appeared in the Ârcika, and is here repeated, accompanied by those others which properly stand in connection with it: the number of such repetitions is so great as to reduce the actual contents of this Veda from one thousand eight hundred and eight ric to one thousand five hundred and forty-nine (not one thousand four hundred and seventy-two, as Benfey has erroneously stated it). In the second portion, the extracts from the eighth and ninth books of the Ṛik bear the same relative proportion to the rest as in the first, but any such internal arrangement of its verses as the latter exhibits is not traceable: invocations of all the divinities occur promiscuously mingled together. The verses which are peculiar to the Sâma present no characteristics to distinguish them from the others: they would appear to belong to hymns which were passed over in making the other collection; a large proportion of them, it may be remarked, are ascribed to Vâmadeva, the author of the fourth book of the Ṛik. The Sâma is provided with a peculiar and very complicated system of accents, consisting of no less than ten different signs: all of them together, however, express nothing different from what is denoted by the two signs

of the other Vedas. Farther than this, it presents very numerous readings, differing considerably from those of the Ṛik; and these are stated to be for the most part of a higher antiquity and originality. It thus becomes an important critical aid to the study of the Ṛik; and in this circumstance, and in the light which its relations to the other collections may be made to shed upon the history of them all, seems to consist for us its chief value. In itself, it is the least interesting of the four Vedas.

The text thus described, however, does not strictly constitute the Sâma-Veda: this, by its name, is a Veda of *sâman,* and as yet we have only *ṛic. Sâman* is a word of not infrequent occurrence in the Vedic texts; its etymology is obscure: that which the Indians themselves give is of no value; its meaning is not a matter of doubt: as distinguished from *ṛic,* it signifies a musically modulated verse, a chant. These ṛic, then, have to undergo a modification to convert them into sâman. And to this end it is not enough that they be simply accompanied with a musical utterance: they are also variously transformed by the protraction of their vowels, the resolution of semi-vowels into vowels, the insertion of sundry sounds, syllables and words, the repetition of portions of the verse, and the like. The ṛic thus changed into their Sâma-form, are to be found in the *Gânas,* works which form a part of the very extensive literature attached to this Veda. By varying the method of its treatment, each ṛic is of course transformable into an indefinite number of different sâman, and this circumstance seems to explain the notices in later Indian works, to the effect that the Sâma-Veda contains four thousand, or even eight thousand sâman.

The general object of this collection is understood to have been, that its chants should be sung during the Soma-ritual: nearer particulars respecting the nature of the connection, the reason of the selection of these verses, the ground of their present arrangement, the method of their application in the ceremonial, it is not at present possible to give: these are matters which it is reserved for future investigations to elucidate.

The Yajur-Veda, the third of the collections, is of a similar character to the last, being yet more clearly intended to subserve a purely liturgical purpose. It grew up at a period

long posterior to that to which is to be assigned the composition of the Vedic hymns, in connection with, and in consequence of, the development which the cultus, the body of religious ceremonies, received. In the early Vedic times, the sacrifice was still in the main an unfettered act of devotion, not committed to the charge of a body of privileged priests, not regulated in its minor details, but left to the free impulses of him who offered it; accompanied with ṛic and sâman, hymns and chants, that the mouth of the offerer might not be silent while his hands were presenting to the divinity the gift which his heart prompted. Thus it is said in a verse of the Sâma (I. 4, 2, 3, 10), "ṛic and sâma we reverence, by whose aid the ceremonies are performed: they two bear rule at the altar; they carry the sacrifice to the gods:" no mention is here made of *yajus*, nor does it seem that the word occurs in the earlier portions of the Vedic writings. As in process of time, however, the ritual assumed a more and more formal character, becoming finally a strictly and minutely regulated succession of single actions, not only were the verses fixed which were to be quoted during the ceremony, but there established themselves likewise a body of utterances, formulas of words, intended to accompany each individual action of the whole work, to explain, excuse, bless, give it a symbolical significancy, or the like. To show the minuteness of detail to which this was often carried, it may be mentioned that the first sentences in the text of the White Yajur-Veda were to be uttered by the priest as he cut from a particular tree a switch with which to drive away the calves from the cows whose milk was to furnish the material of the offering. These sacrificial formulas received the name of *yajus* (from the root *yaj*, "to sacrifice, offer"). A book, then, which should contain the whole body of these expressions, or those of them which were attached to any specified number of ceremonies, would be a Yajur-Veda, Veda of *yajus*. It might contain also many ṛic, which, being connected with certain parts of the ritual as its necessary accompaniments, had themselves become yajus. Such is, in fact, the Yajur-Veda which we possess: its text is made up of these formulas, partly in prose and partly in verse, arranged in the order in which they were to be made use of at the sacrifice. Any internal connection, of course, it does not possess; it would be a complete enigma

to us, if not explained by a specification of the several actions to which, one after another, the formulas are attached. This explanation is furnished partly by the commentaries on the text, and partly by the Brâhmaṇas and Sûtras belonging to it. It lies now in the nature of the case, that the ceremonial would by no means every where be the same in its details; and there might be as many distinct Yajur-Vedas collected as there were in different regions various ways of conducting the sacrifice: and it is in accordance with this, that we find not one, but two principal texts of the Yajur-Veda, called respectively the White and the Black, or the Vâjasaneya and Taittirîya Sanhitâs. The origin of these appellations is not clear: the two latter may be patronymics from the families in which the texts first established themselves. Dr. Weber, however, is inclined to refer both the names Black and Taittirîya (deriving the latter from *tittiri,* the name of the parti-colored, speckled partridge) to the peculiar condition of turbidity, disorder, intermixture, in which the text they are applied to is found: mantra and brâhmaṇa being in it indiscriminately confounded together. Besides the existence of these two independent Sanhitâs, the "schools," *çâkhâs,* of this Veda, whose texts and their mode of application differ in less important particulars, have been exceedingly numerous. The Black Yajur-Veda or Taittirîya Sanhitâ is as yet little known, manuscripts of it being very rare in Europe; the other, by the edition and other labors of Dr. Weber, promises to be sooner and more fully laid open to the knowledge of modern science than any of the other Vedas, not excepting the Sâma. It contains about two thousand yajus, divided into forty *Âdhyâyas,* "lectures:" nearly half of them are in verse, or ric, and of these, far the greater portion are to be found also in the Rig-Veda; they present some various readings, yet not nearly so numerous as those of the Sâma-Veda, nor do they possess the same high value. A list of the sacrifices to which they belong may be found in Colebrooke's Essay: it is unnecessary to repeat it here.

Respecting the fourth Veda, the Atharva, few particulars have as yet been made known to the European public. Manuscripts of its text exist but sparingly, either in England or on the continent, perhaps hardly enough in all to found a really satisfactory edition upon: one or two attempts

to prepare it for publication have been made, and afterwards relinquished for lack of means. It seems, too, to have experienced in Europe, in some measure, the same neglectful treatment which it has suffered in India: there it had to wait long before its claim to be regarded as a Veda was generally allowed; and it is well known to all who are in any degree conversant with the Sanskrit literature, that Ṛik, Sâma and Yajus are often named as the three Vedas, to the entire exclusion of the Atharva: it never, indeed, attained to the high consideration enjoyed by the other collections, nor, so far as is known, found a native commentator. It would be highly unjust, however, that the Indian example should in this respect be followed by us: for to us the Atharva is, next after the Ṛik, the most valuable of the four Vedas, as being itself also a historical collection, and in much the greater part of independent contents. Having taken occasion during the past winter to make a transcript of this Veda from the manuscripts of the Berlin Library, I hope at a future opportunity to give the Society more particular information respecting it: such a general notice, however, as the scope and extent of this paper call for, can already here be offered. First, as to its name: any such characteristic appellation as has been found for each of the other Vedas it seems to lack: its various titles have the air of having been manufactured, and arbitrarily applied to it, in order to challenge for the collection an antiquity and a dignity which do not properly belong to it. Atharvan and Angiras are the names of two of the most ancient and venerated Indian families, which even in the earlier hymns of the Ṛik are invested with a kind of mythical character: it is sought, then, to exalt this collection by asserting its special connection with them: entitling it the Veda of the Atharvan and Angiras, or that of the Atharvan alone: the latter is the appellation by which it is now generally distinguished. Another name by which it is sometimes known, is Brahmâ-Veda. The word Brahmâ, as here used, denotes the chief priest at a sacrificial ceremony, the one charged with the general supervision of the whole; not that he has anything to do with this Veda, but as the other three had been assigned to three of the regularly officiating priests, the Ṛik to the *Hotar,* or "Invoker," the Sâma to the *Udgâtar,* or "Chanter," the Yajus to the *Adhvaryu,* or "Offerer,"

it was found convenient, in order to assume for the Atharva a place in the structure of the Indian cultus analogous to that occupied by the others, to give it a name implying its connection with the Brahmâ. In extent, it stands next to the Rik, comprising nearly six thousand verses, in about six hundred and seventy hymns: these are divided into twenty books, *Kâṇḍas*, precisely why is not known, as the Indian traditions respecting author and the like are still very imperfectly understood: it is at any rate a material, and not a mere formal, division; some of the books have a peculiar character of their own: so the sixth, of which the ric are arranged in tristichs, whereof two in most instances form a hymn; the seventh, of which the hymns are very short, a majority of them containing but a single verse; the fifteenth, which is in prose, and in language and contents nearly akin with the Brâhmaṇas;* the twentieth, which is by far the longest of them all, nearly one thousand ric, most of them addressed to Indra, and all extracted, without variation, from the hymns of the Rik. It has been estimated that about one-third of the whole number occur again in the other Veda: here, however, they almost uniformly (excepting in the twentieth book) present readings varying very greatly from those of the latter: they appear to be generally of a much later and less genuine character, and are sometimes, it may be, even conscious arbitrary transformations of the original text. As to the internal character of the Atharva hymns, it may be said of them, as of the tenth book of the Rik, that they are the productions of another and a later period, and the expressions of a different spirit, from that of the earlier hymns in the other Veda. In the latter, the gods are approached with reverential awe, indeed, but with love and confidence also: a worship is paid them that exalts the offerer of it; the demons, embraced under the general name *Rakshas*, are objects of horror, whom the gods ward off and destroy; the divinities of the Atharva are regarded rather with a kind of cringing fear, as powers whose wrath is to be deprecated, and whose favor curried for: it knows a whole host of imps and hobgoblins, in ranks and classes, and addresses itself to them directly, offering them homage to

* This has been published, text and translation, by Dr. Aufrecht, in the first volume of Weber's *Indische Studien*.

induce them to abstain from doing harm. The *mantra*, prayer, which in the older Veda is the instrument of devotion, is here rather the tool of superstition: it wrings from the unwilling hands of the gods the favors which of old their good will to men induced them to grant, or by simple magical power obtains the fulfillment of the utterer's wishes. The most prominent characteristic feature of the Atharva is the multitude of incantations which it contains; these are pronounced either by the person who is himself to be benefitted, or, more often, by the sorcerer for him, and are directed to the procuring of the greatest variety of desirable ends: most frequently, perhaps, long life, or recovery from grievous sickness, is the object sought: then a talisman, such as a necklace, is sometimes given, or in very numerous cases some plant endowed with marvellous virtues is to be the immediate external means of the cure; farther, the attainment of wealth or power is aimed at, the downfall of enemies, success in love or in play, the removal of petty pests, and so on, even down to the growth of hair on a bald pate. There are hymns, too, in which a single rite or ceremony is taken up and exalted, somewhat in the same strain as the Soma in the pâvamânya hymns of the Ṛik. Others of a speculative mystical character are not wanting; yet their number is not so great as might naturally be expected, considering the development which the Hindû religion received in the periods following after that of the primitive Veda. It seems in the main, that the Atharva is of popular rather than of priestly origin; that, in making the transition from the Vedic to modern times, it forms an intermediate step rather to the gross idolatries and superstitions of the ignorant mass, than to the sublimated pantheism of the Brahmans.

After this summary view of the single Vedas, it would be quite in order here to consider the general questions of the period of their composition, and their history as collections. But these points are still for the most part too obscure to admit of even an approximate solution. That must depend on the one hand, on a thorough investigation of all the internal evidences to be derived from the texts themselves, which is not practicable until the latter shall have been placed within more general reach; and on the other hand, on a reduction to chronological order of the present chaos of Indian literature and Indian history, which is a task, the

satisfactory accomplishment of which may be even yet far distant. It is, perhaps, not worth while to attempt fixing the Vedic period more nearly than by saying that general considerations seem to refer it, with much probability, to the earlier half of the second thousand years preceding the Christian era. The time which the hymns themselves cover will not be to be measured by tens of years alone; and how much later, where, and under whose direction, their collection may have taken place, it is not now possible to determine. It seems likely, from the nature, as stated above, of the readings presented by the Sâma-Veda, that its verses may have been first rescued from the careless custody of oral tradition, and committed to writing: the immediate wants of the ceremonial might easily make themselves first felt, and the desire to treasure up the whole body of these venerated relics of the past have arisen later. At whatever time the work of collection may have been performed, it constituted a decided era in the Indian literary history: from this time the texts became a chief object of the science and industry of the nation, as their contents had always been of its highest reverence and admiration; and so thorough and religious was the care bestowed upon their preservation that, notwithstanding their mass and the thousands of years which have elapsed since their collection, not a single various reading, so far as is yet known, has been suffered to make its way into them. The influence which they have exerted upon the whole literary development of after ages is not easily to be rated too high. Entire classes of writings, forming a very large portion of the Sanskrit literature now in our hands, concern themselves directly with, and were occasioned by them; and they may even be said, in a sense, to be the direct efficient causes of that whole literature, since it was in the endeavor to restore the knowledge of their antiquated and half-understood dialect that the Indian people came to a consciousness of their own language: upon the Vedic grammar was founded the Sanskrit grammar, which snatched the language from the influence of farther corruption, and fixed it for all future ages as the instrument of learned and elegant composition. Any thing like a full consideration here, however, of this highly interesting subject, the direct part which the Vedas have performed in shaping the later Indian history, would lead too far: farther discussion of it may be deferred to another opportunity.

It remains, then, to give a comprehensive statement of the main results which the Vedas have hitherto yielded to the history of Indian antiquity. And it may be worth while, here, to notice precisely in what way they render their assistance. It is, namely, by presenting, not a designed description, but an unconscious picture, of that primitive condition out of which the institutions of following times sprung. In such a picture, particularly as taken from a single point of view, the religious one, there are naturally some points left out which we miss with regret, and others thrown into shadow which we could have wished to see brought out into clear light; yet this is an evil which is lessened by the very considerable extent of the Vedic writings, and farther consolation may be found in the consideration that, owing to the lamentable lack of a historic sense, which has ever been one of the most remarkable characteristics of the Indian mind, rendering all direct native testimony to a fact next to utterly worthless, only such indirect and unconscious notices could be relied upon as evidence. We are sure that in these texts was deposited a faithful and undistorted, if an imperfect, representation of relations existing at the time of their composition. Nor, as was shown above, have they been falsified by succeeding generations: however far they may have become removed from the comprehension of the Hindû, beyond full recovery to such efforts as his philology was capable of, however far the development of his civilization may have led him from the condition which they picture, the texts themselves were sacred, not to be altered: it was only allowed to interpretation to distort their meaning into a conformity with the dogmas of later days. It is to be remarked also, that, as things are at present situated, the Vedic period itself is more clearly laid open to us than some of those which succeed it, and that many steps in the progress of transition to the condition of modern times still remain obscure. Such deficiencies we can only hope satisfactorily to make up when the whole Indian literature shall have been more thoroughly investigated: till then we must be content to theorize across the interval with a probably near approach to truth.

We commence with a view of the geographical and social relations exhibited by these books. It has long been looked upon as settled beyond dispute that the present possessors

of India were not the earliest owners of the soil, but, at a time not far beyond the reach of history, had made their way into the peninsula from its north-western side, over the passes of the Hindu-Koh, through the valley of the Kabul, across the wastes of the Penjab. And the Vedas show them as still only upon the threshold of their promised land, on the Indus, namely, and the region on either side of it, covering the whole Penjab, extending across the little neck of territory which, watered by the holy Sarasvatî, connects the latter with the great basin of Central Hindostan, and touching the borders of this basin on the courses of the Upper Yamuna and Ganges. The Ganges, however, is mentioned but once in the whole Rik, and then in a hymn of the tenth book in which it is called upon to join with all other streams in the exaltation of the Indus, the king of rivers. The latter, *Sindhu,* "river," par excellence, and the rivers of the Penjab are most frequently mentioned; and the region which they embrace is the proper scene in which the action of the Vedas is laid. For this country in general, its inhabitants have no more definite name than *sapta sindhavas,* "the seven rivers;" it may not be necessary to seek here just so many distinct streams: seven, according to the use of it so common in early times, may represent an indefinite number; if we choose, however, the required seven may be readily found in the Indus, its main western tributary, the Kabul, and the five chief streams of the Penjab. This territory is broken up into many petty districts, each shut out from near connection with the adjoining by mountains or wastes. And the political state of the people is such as this natural conformation of country must condition; they are divided into clans or tribes, independent of one another, save as they are bound together by the consciousness of a common descent, language, and religion, and by their united hostility to the original possessors of the soil on which they now have foothold. As distinguished from these, they entitle themselves Arians, *Âryas,* "the honorable," and call the former *dasyus,* "enemies, disturbers": among themselves, their simple appellation is generally *Viç,* "the dwellers, peoples." The exact form of their state is not a point which by positive notices is brought clearly to light in the hymns: the position of member of a political body, subject of a government, is one in which the individual is very rarely conceived

of: it is as head of a family, master of wealth, that he makes his appearance; this is the grand central relation, in its bearing upon which every thing else is viewed. Such negative evidence alone, however, might be deemed sufficient to show that the Vedic peoples, like other races whom we know at similar primitive epochs in their history, were communities of freemen, whose kings were no more than their chief men and leaders in war. They were not strictly agricultural, although not neglecting the cultivation of the earth, when tempting opportunity offered itself: for their chief possessions were their flocks and herds. Among these, the horned cattle, kine, occupy as prominent a place as throughout the whole after course of Indian history: they form the main source and sign of wealth: the word *gau,* "cow," exhibits in the Vedic language the same extensive ramifications of meaning and composition as in the later Sanskrit; sheep and goats are not infrequently mentioned, yet make comparatively a very small figure; the horse is common and highly valued: as the noblest animal which the Vedic people knew, he is made in the hymns a most frequent subject of comparison and eulogy; he seems to have been used chiefly as an ally in war, to draw the battle-chariots (riding on horseback is unknown), and not to have been reduced to the servitude of the plough: he occupies, then, much the same position as in later times the elephant. The latter animal the Indians had hitherto hardly been introduced to: the assertion sometimes met with, that he was already at this period a domesticated animal, is founded on a misunderstanding of passages in which his name has been supposed to occur; he is, in fact, mentioned but two or three times in the Rik, by the name *mṛigo hastî,* "the beast with a hand," and in such a way as to show that he was still an object of wonder and terror; in the Atharva he occurs also very rarely, under the names *hastin* (the *mṛigas* now left off), and *dvâpin,* "double-drinker," and is exalted as the mightiest and most magnificent of animals: nothing appears there, however, to show that he had been reduced to the service of man. The commonest enemy of the herds is the wolf; the lion is also frequently mentioned; and, in the Atharva, the tiger; the bear is of very rare occurrence. If not properly an agricultural, this was by no means a nomadic people: pasturage for their herds was too abundant to compel

them often to change their location: they dwelt together in open villages, *grâmas,* or in fortified strong-holds, *pur.* They are a warlike race, engaged in constant hostilities not only with their aboriginal foes, but with their Arian brethren likewise: the object is that for which alone such a people strive, booty. It is with no evil conscience that they wage this predatory warfare: they ask of their gods success in it with the utmost simplicity and good faith; their prayers are ever, not for the peaceable preservation and increase only of their present possessions, but that they may be enriched with the spoils of their enemies. Their names for the combat, the similes they derive from it, the whole strain in which it is mentioned in their hymns, witness to the thorough zest and spirit with which they fought. Their weapons are the usual ones: sword, bow, spear, mail, and the like. The peaceful arts are not so prominent among them, as indeed in this respect the Indians always remained far behind the Egyptians and Chinese: any thing like architecture is not alluded to; from the circumstance that the artful construction of a poetic verse is often compared to the fabrication of a chariot by a smith, it would seem that the latter was the most perfect work of handicraft which they knew. Poetry is, of course, in full bloom; the art of lyrical composition is highly prized, and its productions, as the poets themselves in their hymns not seldom boast, are dearly paid for by the rich and great.

In all this, as will have been already remarked, appears nothing of that system of castes which has come to form so essential a part of our conceptions of the Indian state. And it is evident that such a system would be highly incongruous with a condition of things like that here described: where the population generally is a grazing and agricultural one, there could be no separate caste of tillers of the earth; where all are warriors, no class of soldiers; where each individual has full access by offering to the gods, no privileged order of priests. In the early Vedic times, then, the castes had no existence; the process by which they afterwards developed themselves, if not yet clear in all its details, may nevertheless be traced out, in the main, with tolerable certainty. From the mass of the Arian population severed themselves in course of time two privileged classes, a priesthood and an aristocracy. The beginnings of the former

appear very early, in the employment by the great of certain individuals or families distinguished for wisdom, sanctity, poetic gift, as their representatives in worship, under the title of *purohita,* "one set in front." The change of the free Vedic religion into a regulated ceremonial would be accompanied by the growth of such families into a class who should possess a monopoly of communication with the gods; the accumulative possession of hereditary learning, exemption from the struggles and commotions amid which the later order of things was founded, would rapidly increase their influence and power; and among a people of such religious tendencies as the Hindûs, they might readily attain to the highest rank and consideration in the state. The name which they received marks them as those who busied themselves with, had the charge of, worship. The neuter noun *bráhman,* which has become the parent of a whole family of derivatives, is of frequent occurrence in the Veda: it comes from the root *bṛih,* "to exert, strain, extend," and denotes simply "worship," as the offering which the elevated affections and strained desires of the devout bring to the gods. From it, by a customary formative process, the gender being changed, and the accent thrown forward, is derived the masculine *brahmán,* signifying any presenter of such an offering, "a worshipper." These are the only significations of these two terms in the earlier parts of the Veda: their application to denote the impersonal divine principle, and the impersonation of that principle as highest divinity, is much later, and the work not so much of the religion, as of the religious philosophy, of the Hindû.. The latter of the two has also become one of the names of the caste, but this is more frequently distinguished by the title *Brâhmaṇa,* which is an adjective formation from the neuter *bráhman* in its signification as given above. The second class would seem to have been founded by the families of those petty princes who had borne rule in the olden time, but had most of them lost their regal authority in the convulsions which attended the transference of the race from the narrower limits of the Penjab to the great valley of Hindostan, and the consolidation of the separate clans into extensive monarchies. Their name, *Kshatriya,* is an adjective from the ancient noun *kshatra,* which, as meaning "rule, dominion," occurs in all the three languages of the Veda, the Avesta, and the Persian inscrip-

tions: it denotes, originally, simply "possessed of authority," and is so sometimes applied in the Veda even to the gods. After the separation from it of these two classes, the great mass of the Arian population would remain to constitute the third caste, still retaining the appellation *Viç* (or its derivative *Vaiçya*), which had been once the name of the whole people. The fourth class was not of Arian extraction, but was composed of such of the ancient possessors of the soil as had preferred to submit to, rather than retire before, the superior power of the invader, and became incorporated into the state in the capacity of menial dependents upon their conquerors. Their name, *Çûdra,* is probably the native appellation of a people thus reduced: it is a word of very rare occurrence in the Vedas, as we have already seen that the Arians commonly styled their native foes *dasyus;* in a single hymn of the Atharva, however, Çûdra is directly contrasted with Arian, and protection besought from an enemy of the one as of the other race. Farther than this it occurs only as name of the caste; for it should be observed that the period of composition of some of the Vedic lyrics extends itself down to a time when the system had in its main features become distinctly established: hymns of the tenth book of the Ṛik and of the Atharva recognize the four principal classes, and one even presents the fable of their origin from different parts of the body of the Deity.

It lies in the nature of the case, that the Vedic writings present upon no other point in Indian antiquity so full and detailed information as upon the ancient Indian religion. Nor could we, though having regard to the elucidation of Indian history alone, well wish it otherwise. Considering how closely, as already remarked, the whole course of that history is intertwined with religion, considering too what vast influence the later religious institutions and creations of India have had upon so large a portion of the human race, and how difficult was the problem they offered to one who would understand them thoroughly in their origin and history, nothing was more to be desired than just that picture which the Vedas present of the original national creed out of which all the others, in obedience to the laws imposed by the intellectual and moral growth of the people, sprung.

After what has been already seen of the difference between ancient and modern periods in the Indian history, no

one will be surprised to find the Vedic religion as much unlike the creeds which have been wont, until very recently, to go exclusively by the name of Indian as the free Vedic state is unlike the artificially regulated institutions of Brahmanism. So wide and fundamental a difference, however, as actually exists, one might not be prepared for: saving a few names, they seem at first sight to have nothing in common; the chief figures in each are either entirely wanting in the other, or occupy so changed a position as to be scarcely recognizable for the same. To characterize the Vedic religion in general terms is not difficult: it is not one which has originated in the minds of single individuals, inspired or uninspired, and by them been taught to others; it is not one which has been nursed into its present form by the fostering care of a caste or priesthood; it is one which has arisen in the whole body of the people, and is a true expression of the collective view which a simple-minded, but highly gifted nation, inclined to religious veneration, took of the wonders of creation and the powers to which it conceived them ascribable. It is, what every original religion must be that is not communicated to man by direct inspiration from above, a nature-religion, a worship of the powers supposed to lie back of and produce the phenomena of the visible world. And in its character as such a religion it is the purest of those of which record has come down to us from antiquity, the least mixed with elements of reflection, of abstraction, of systematizing. It bears to the early religions of the other members of the Indo-European family such a relation as the Vedic dialect to their languages: being the most original, the least distorted, and the purest of them all; the one in which may be traced out most of the features of that creed which we may suppose to have been common to the whole family at the time of their dispersion; the one, too, which for its transparency and simplicity is best calculated to illustrate the rise and growth of such a religion in general. These properties lend it a high value as a guide to the explanation of the obscure myths and observances of the other kindred nations; and its importance for the investigation of the general history of religions among mankind is not less decided. These are not matters, however, which properly come under our particular notice here: it will be enough to have thus briefly referred to them before passing

on to a summary presentation of the main features of the religion itself, and some of its more important relations to its Indian successors.

It is a very ancient classification of the Vedic divinities, being known to the hymns themselves, that allots them severally to one of the three domains: of earth, atmosphere, and heaven. This division may be conveniently retained here, and we may commence our view with the gods of the lower region, the earth.

The earth herself makes no remarkable figure here: she is indeed deified, at least partially; is addressed as the mother and sustainer of all beings; is, generally in company with the sky, invoked to grant blessings; yet this never advanced farther than a lively personification might go. The same may be said of rivers, trees, and other objects upon the earth's surface: they are not of the class of appearances which the Indian seized upon as objects of his veneration; they do not offer points enough capable of being grasped by the fancy, were too little mysterious. Only one phenomenon, namely fire, was calculated to give rise to so distinct a conception of something divine as to appear as a fully developed divinity. Again, the god of fire (the name is identical with the Latin *ignis*), is one of the most prominent in the whole Pantheon: his hymns are more numerous than those to any other god. Astonishment and admiration at the properties of this element, as the most wonderful and mysterious of all with which man comes into daily and familiar contact, and exultation over its reduction to the service and partial control of mankind, are abundantly expressed in the manner in which he is addressed. He is praised as an immortal among mortals, a divinity upon earth: his nobleness and condescension, that he, a god, deigns to sit here in the very dwellings of men, are extolled. The other gods have established him here as high priest and mediator for the human race: he was the first who made sacrifice and taught men to have recourse above; he is messenger between heaven and earth; he on the one hand bears aloft the prayers and offerings, and secures their gaining in return the blessings demanded, and on the other brings the gods themselves to the altar of their worshipper, and puts them in possession there of the gifts presented to them. When the sun is down, and the daylight gone, Agni

is the only divinity left on earth to protect mortals till the following dawn: his beams then shine abroad, and dispel the demons of darkness, the Rakshas, whose peculiar enemy and destroyer he is. These attributes and offices form the staple theme of his songs, amplified and varied without limit, and coupled with general ascriptions of praise, and prayers for blessings to be directly bestowed by him, or granted through his intercession. Among his frequent appellations are *vaiçvânara,* "the to all men belonging," *havyaváha,* "bearer of the offering," *jâtavedas* and *viçvavedas,* "all-possessing," *pâvaka,* "purifier," *rakshohan,* "demon-slayer." He is styled son of the lightning or of the sun, as sometimes kindled by them; but, as in all primitive nations, the ordinary mode of his production is by the friction of two dry billets of wood, and this birth of his, as a wonder and a mystery unparalleled, is painted in the hymns in dark and highly symbolical language: the ten fingers of the kindler are ten virgins who bring him to birth; the two bits of wood are his mothers; once born he grows up rapidly in their lap, as they lie there prostrate upon the earth; he turns upon them, but not for milk: he devours them; the arms of the kindler fear him, and lift themselves above him in wonder. Agni's proper offering is clarified butter, ghee, *ghṛita;* when this is sprinkled into the flame, it mounts higher and glows more fiercely: he has devoured the gift, and thus testifies his satisfaction and pleasure.

To the second domain, the atmosphere, belong the various divinities of the wind and storm. God of the breeze, the gentler motion of the air, is Vâyu (from the root *vâ,* "to blow"). He drives a thousand steeds; his breath chases away the demons; he comes in the earliest morning, as the first breath of air that stirs itself at day-break, to drink the soma, and the Auroras weave for him shining garments. The storm-winds are a troop, the Marut or Rudras: the two names are indifferently used, but the former is much the more usual (the etymology of neither is fully established). They ride on spotted stags, wear shining armor, and carry spears in their hands; no one knows whence they come nor whither they go; their voice is heard aloud as they come rushing on; the earth trembles and the mountains shake before them. They belong in Indra's train; are his almost constant allies and companions. They are called the sons of

Rudra, who is conceived of as peculiar god of the tempest. As their father, he is very often mentioned; as a divinity with independent attributes, he is of much rarer occurrence; hymns addressed to him alone are but few. He is, as might be expected, a terrible god: he carries a great bow from which he hurls a sharp missile at the earth; he is called the "slayer of men," *kshayadvîra;* his wrath is deprecated, and he is besought not to harm his worshipper; if not in the Rik, at least in the Atharva and Brâhmaṇas, he is styled "lord of the animals," as the unhoused beasts of the field are especially at the mercy of the pitiless storm. At the same time he is, to propitiate him, addressed as master of a thousand remedies, best of physicians, protector from harm: this may have its ground, too, partly in the beneficial effects of the tempest in freshening the atmosphere of that sultry clime. Rudra's chief interest consists in the circumstance that he forms the point of connection between the Vedic religion and the later Çiva-worship. Çiva is a god unknown to the Vedas: his name is a word of not infrequent occurrence in the hymns, indeed, but means simply "propitious;" not even in the Atharva is it the epithet of a particular divinity, or distinguished by its usage from any other adjective. As given to him whose title it has since become, it seems one of those euphemisms so frequent in the Indian religion, applied as a soothing and flattering address to the most terrible god in the whole Pantheon. The precise relation between Çiva and Rudra is not yet satisfactorily traced out. The introduction of an entirely new divinity from the mountains of the north has been supposed, who was grafted in upon the ancient religion by being identified with Rudra; or again a blending of some of Agni's attributes with those of Rudra to originate a new development: perhaps neither of these may be necessary; Çiva may be a local form of Rudra, arisen under the influence of peculiar climatic relations in the districts from which he made his way down into Hindostan proper; introduced among and readily accepted by a people which, as the Atharva shows, was strongly tending toward a terrorism in its religion.

The chief god of this division, however, and indeed the most conspicuous in the whole list of Vedic divinities, is Indra. The etymology of his name is still disputed; his natural significance is not a matter of doubt: he is the god

of the clear blue sky. That his worship under this name is earlier than the separation of the Arians into their two branches, is proved by his occurrence among the Devs mentioned in the Avesta; it is difficult, however, to believe that the great development and prominence of the myth of which he is the representative, and his consequent high rank, are not properly Indian. The kernel of the Indian myth, namely, is as follows. The clouds are conceived of as a covering in which a hostile demon, *Vritra*, "the enveloper," extends himself over the face of the sky, hiding the sun, threatening to blot out the light, and withholding from the earth the heavenly waters. Indra engages in fierce combat with him, and pierces him with his thunderbolt; the waters are released, and fall in abundant showers upon the earth, and the sun and the clear sky are again restored to view. Or again, the demons have stolen the reservoirs of water, represented under the figure of herds of kine, and hidden them away in the hollows of the mountains; Indra finds them, splits the caverns with his bolt, and they are set again at liberty. This is the centre about which the greatness of Indra has grown up. In it there may be something derived from the earliest antiquity of the Indo-European family, as the occurrence of strikingly similar traits in the earliest Greek and Roman myths gives reason to believe. But that it should ever have advanced to such a degree of importance, elevating the deity to whom it is attached to the very first rank, is hardly conceivable save in a dry and arid country like the Penjab, where the rains are the conditions of all prosperity, and their interruption brings with it immediate and general suffering. In the more northern land of the Zoroastric people, as appears particularly from the earliest books of the Vendidad, cold, and not drought, is the enemy most feared: the winter is there the work of the demons that comes in to blast Ahura Mazdâ's fair creation, and as a refuge against the evils of which Yima builds his abode of the blest. Had the original nature-religion there been left to follow its natural development, it could never have been an Indra that should lift himself to the first place in it. Be this as it may, Indra stands at the head of the Vedic divinities. By this is not meant, however, that he is king among them, endowed with any authority over the rest: no such reduction to system of this religion had taken

place as should establish a relation of this kind among its gods: each is as independent in his own domain as the natural phenomena of which they are the personifications; nor again, that the nature of his attributes and of his concerns with the affairs of human life is such as to surround him with the highest interest, to invest him with the most commanding dignity of character: in this regard, as will be seen, Varuṇa stands decidedly above him; but only, that he is the most conspicuous of them all, the one who, as most nearly concerned in the procuring of the ordinary blessings of physical life, is the most frequent and favorite theme of praise and invocation. He drives a chariot drawn by two yellow horses; the thunderbolt is his weapon; the storm-winds, the Marut, are his usual companions. It is needless to attempt an enumeration of the endlessly varied features which the hymns to his praise present: a few among his most frequent epithets are *maghavan,* "possessor of might," *marutvat,* "leader of the Marut," *çakra,* "powerful," *çatakratu,* "of hundred-fold strength," *vṛitrahan,* "Vṛitra-slayer," *somapâ,* "soma-drinker." His own proper offering is the soma: he comes in his chariot to quaff the draughts of it presented to him by his worshippers, and then, in the fury it produces, drives off at once to transfix Vṛitra, and break open the fastnesses of the mountains.

The gods of the third domain, of heaven, are for the most part those who represent the various phenomena of light. The very prominent part which this element has played in giving form to the earliest religions of all nations is well known; that of the Indian forms no exception: he even manifests a peculiar sensitiveness to the blessings of the light, and a peculiar abhorrence of darkness. The former is to him life, motion, happiness, truth; the latter death, helplessness, evil, the time and abode of demons. Accordingly, the phenomena of the night, moon and stars, he almost ignores: the one makes no figure at all in his religion, the others are but rarely even alluded to. The worship of the Indian commenced at day-break: Ushas, the dawn, is the earliest subject of his morning songs. The promise of the day is hailed with overflowing and inspiring joy; the feeling of relief as the burden of darkness is lifted off the world, and the freedom and cheerfulness of the day commence again, prompts to truly poetic strains, and the

songs to Ushas are among the finest in the Veda. She is addressed as a virgin in glittering robes, who chases away the darkness, or to whom her sister night willingly yields her domain; who prepares a path for the sun; is the signal of the sacrifice; rouses all beings from slumber; gives sight to the darkened, power of motion to the prostrate and helpless. In the midst of such gladsome greetings, however, the poet is reminded by the thought of the many dawns that have thus shone upon the earth, and the many that are to follow them, of those who having witnessed the former ones are now passed away, and of those again who shall welcome them when he is no more; and so he is led to mournful reflections on the wasting away of life as one day after another is subtracted from the time allotted to each mortal.

Here will be best noticed two enigmatical divinities, the Açvin, since they are brought into a special connection with the earliest morning, and if their explanation is to be found in natural phenomena it must be sought here. The oldest Indian theology is greatly at a loss how to explain their essence, nor have modern attempts met with much better success. They are never addressed separately, nor by distinct names: they are simply Açvinau, "the two horsemen." They are conspicuous figures in the Vedic Pantheon; their hymns are numerous and often very long. The later mythology makes them the physicians of the gods; here they are general benefactors of men, and helpers in circumstances of difficulty and distress. They are peculiarly rich in myths: some of their hymns are little more than recitals of the many particular favors they have shown to individuals named: they have given a husband or a wife; brought back a lost child; restored the blind to sight; relieved one of his worthless old body, furnishing him a new one instead of it; supplied another with a servicable metal leg, to replace one lost in battle; rescued one who was in danger of drowning; drawn another out of a deep pit; and the like. They ride together upon a golden chariot, all the parts of which are in threes. Their great antiquity is attested by the mention made of them in two passages of the Avesta; and it seems far from impossible that they may be originally identical with the Dioscuri of the Greeks.

To the other gods of this division belongs more or less distinctly the common name of Âditya. Of the Âdityas, as is well known, the later mythology counts twelve, all sun-gods, and representing that luminary in phases of the twelve months: they are sons of Aditi, and over against them are made to stand the Daityas, sons of Diti. All this the Vedas show to be a fabrication of the modern mythologizing. In the ancient religion exist no such beings as the Daityas, the number of the Âdityas is no where fixed, and so many as twelve it would be impossible to bring together; nor do they stand as a class in any connection with the sun: they are much rather founded upon conceptions of the beneficent influences of the element of light in general; yet ideas of a different origin and significancy are here grouped together, and the names of many of them, and their characteristics, lift them more from the domain of a pure nature-religion into that of one based upon moral relations. It seems as if here were an attempt on the part of the Indian religion to take a new development in a moral direction, which a change in the character and circumstances of the people had caused to fail in the midst, and fall back again into forgetfulness, while yet half finished and indistinct. Their name, *Âditya*, comes from the noun *aditi*, which signifies literally "unharmableness, indestructibility;" and it denotes them as "they of an eternal, unapproachable nature." The elevation of Aditi herself to the rank of a distinct personage may be a reflex from the derivative, which was capable of being interpreted as a patronymic, instead of as an appellative, and made to mean "sons of Aditi." Already in the early hymns, however, appears the germ of what she became in after times: she is not infrequently invoked in a general prayer to the gods, and is now and then addressed as a king's daughter, she of fair children, and the like; but this personification never went far enough to entitle her fairly to a place in the list of Vedic divinities. To the Âdityas is ascribed unapproachability by any thing that can harm or disturb; in them can be distinguished neither right hand nor left, form nor limit; they are elevated above all imperfections; do not sleep nor wink; their character is all truth; they hate and punish guilt; to preserve mortals from sin is their highest office; they have a peculiar title to the epithet *asura*, "immaterial, spiritual" (for this is the proper and

original meaning of this term: it does not come from the root *svar,* "to shine," with *a* privitive, although on the strength of this etymology the later Indians have manufactured a word *sura* as correlative to it; it is a derivative adjective from the noun *asu,* "life, existence," which itself is from the root *as:* if it came to denote "demonic, demon" (and this, along with the other, is its frequent signification in the Veda also), it seems to be only such a transfer as *demon* itself exhibits, or as appears in our use of *spirits* chiefly to denote those of an evil and malign influence).

Three of the gods who may in the most liberal reckoning be counted among the Âdityas, namely, Savitar, Vishnu, Pûshan, cannot by virtue of their characters offer so clear a title to the rank. Though the name is often applied to them, it is more as a honorific epithet: in hymns addressed directly to the Âdityas, ascribing to them the attributes stated above, they do not occur. They stand in a nearer relation to the sun, as impersonations of that luminary in different characters. The sun himself, indeed, as should be remarked before proceeding farther, assumes not infrequently, under his ordinary name of Sûrya, the character of a divinity, and is addressed as such; is himself styled an Âditya, is said to drive a chariot drawn by seven golden steeds, to fright away the night, to make the constellations fly and hide themselves like thieves, and the like. This, however, is not carried so far as to give him any prominence or peculiar importance; as already remarked, it is not in the character of the Vedic religion to attach its highest veneration to phenomena so distinct and comprehensible as such: the sun is considered rather as a single manifestation of the element of light; is quite as often personified as the ornamented bird of heaven, or as a great steed, whom Mitra and Varuṇa made for the good of mortals; who causes all men to rejoice, as like a hero he mounts up on the firmament. Savitar, the first of the three above mentioned, is the sun or the light considered as a producing, enlivening power (the word means simply "generator"). He is not the sun itself: that is said to be his constant companion, in whose rays he takes delight. He both gladdens the earth with light and envelops it again in darkness; rouses and sends to rest all mortals; gives to men their life, to the gods their immortality; he stretches out his golden arms over all creation, as

if to bless it; his almost constant epithet is *deva,* "shining, heavenly." Vishnu is the only one of the great gods of the Hindû triad who makes his appearance under the same name in the Veda. Here, however, there is absolutely nothing which points to any such development as he was afterwards to receive. The history of the religion of Vishnu is not clearer than of that of Çiva. It seems however to have been, like the latter, of a popular local origin, and perhaps to have fused together many local divinities into one person. Both Çiva and Vishnu were supreme and independent gods, each to his own followers: it was only the priest-caste, as they saw their position endangered by the powerful uprising of the new religions, and were compelled, in order to maintain themselves, to take a stand at the head of the movement, and give it a direction, who forced them into a theoretical connection with one another, adding to complete the system a god Brahma, who was the mere creature of learned reflection, and never had any hold at all on the popular mind. Vishnu in the Veda is the sun in his three stations of rise, zenith, and setting; this the Vedic poets conceive of as a striding through heaven at three steps: this is Vishnu's great deed which in all his hymns is sung to his praise; it constitutes the only peculiar trait belonging to him. Of these steps it is said that two of them are near to the habitations of men; the third none can attain, not even the bird in its flight: he made them for the benefit of mortals, that all might live safe and happy under them; the middle station, the zenith, is called Vishnu's place. The third of these divinities, Pûshan (the name means "nourisher, prosperer"), is especially distinguished by the myths and attributes with which he is richly furnished: he is protector of the flocks, and bears the shepherd's crook as his weapon; his chariot is drawn by goats, and a goat is sacrificed to him; another common offering to him is soup, whence, as a kind of joke upon him, he is said to have bad teeth, as if able to eat nothing but broth; he exercises a special care over roads, and is the best guide to be invoked on a journey.

The gods who are in the fullest sense Âdityas are Daksha, Ança, Bhaga, Aryaman, Mitra, Varuṇa. The words, all save the last, have a moral meaning. Daksha is "insight, skill, cleverness;" Ança is "attainment, portion;" Bhaga

has a very similar meaning, "share, fortune, enjoyment:" this is the word which in the language of the Persian inscriptions, and in that of the Slavic nations, has come to mean "god" in general; Aryaman is less clear: by the etymology it should mean something like "honorable;" it seems to be used for "patron, protector;" Mitra is "friend." These five make but a faint and subordinate figure in the Veda: Daksha and Ança are even very rarely mentioned; Bhaga appears more frequently, but only in general invocations of the Âdityas, or of all the gods, with no distinctive features; Aryaman's name stands very often connected with those of Mitra and Varuṇa, but he has no prominent independent subsistence, nor is he particularly characterized; and finally Mitra himself is, save in one single hymn, invoked only in the closest connection with Varuṇa. Varuṇa is the central figure in the group, the one in whom the attributes of the whole class are united and exalted into higher majesty, who stands forth the noblest figure in the Vedic religion. His name is identical with the Greek *Οὐρανός;* coming from the root *vṛi,* "to envelop," it signifies the all-embracing heaven, the outermost boundary of creation, which contains within itself the whole universe with its phenomena. Such a fundamental idea was peculiarly qualified to receive the development which has here been given to it. Varuṇa, namely, is the orderer and ruler of the universe; he established the eternal laws which govern the movements of the world, and which neither immortal nor mortal may break; he regulated the seasons; appointed sun, moon, and stars their courses; gave to each creature that which is its peculiar characteristic. In a no less degree is he a moral governor: to the Âdityas and to him in particular attach themselves very remarkable, almost Christian, ideas respecting moral right and wrong, transgression and its punishment; here the truly devout and pious spirit of the ancient Indian manifests itself most plainly. While in hymns to the other divinities long life, wealth, power, are the objects commonly prayed for, of the Âdityas is craved purity, forgiveness of sin, freedom from its farther commission; to them are offered humble confessions of guilt and repentance; it is a sore grief to the poets to know that man daily transgresses Varuṇa's commands; they acknowledge that without his aid they are not masters of a single moment; they fly

to him for refuge from evil, expressing at the same time all confidence that their prayers will be heard and granted. From his station in the heaven Varuṇa sees and hears every thing: nothing can remain hidden from him; he is surrounded, too, by a train of ministers, "spies," *spaças,* who, restless, unerring, watch heaven and earth to note iniquity, or go about bearing in their hands Varuṇa's bonds, sickness and death, with which to bind the guilty. These spies are a very ancient feature in the Arian religion: they appear again in the Avesta, being there assigned to Mithra. The coincidences indeed throughout this whole domain between Indian and Persian religions are in the highest degree striking and interesting. Ahura Mazdâ, Ormuzd, himself is, as is hardly to be doubted, a development of Varuṇa; the Âdityas are correlatives of the Amshaspands; there even exists in the Persian the same close connection between Ahura Mazdâ and Mithra, as in the Indian between Mitra and Varuṇa: and this is so much the more striking as since the Zoroastric reformation of the Persian religion there was properly no longer a place there for Mithra, and he is not even numbered among the Amshaspands.

This most interesting side of the ancient Indian religion exhibits itself in the Vedic hymns as already fading into oblivion: the process of degradation of Varuṇa, its principal representation, which has later stripped him of all his majestic attributes, and converted him into a mere god of the ocean, is commenced; Indra, on the one hand, is rising to a position of greater prominence and honor above him, and on the other hand various single allusions show that a special connection between him and the waters was already establishing itself; on what principle the latter was founded does not admit at present of being satisfactorily shown.

Our view of the Vedic religion would be essentially defective, did we fail to take notice of what was the state of belief prevailing in it respecting that important point, immortality and a future life. That the later ideas of transmigration and the like had no existence in it, it is hardly necessary to say. In place of them appears a simple faith that the life in this world is not the last of man, that after death he goes to an abode of happiness above. Yama, here as later, is the chief personage with whom this abode stands connected. He is not the terrible being, however, into which

a shuddering fear of death afterwards converted him: his character is a beneficent and attractive one; he is simply chief and ruler of the dead; he grants to departed souls a resting-place where they enjoy in his company happiness without alloy. His origin and primitive significance give him this position. For his name does not come, according to the usual interpretation, from the root *yam,* "to subdue, repress:" it is radically akin to the Latin *gem-ini,* etc., and means "twin." In him and his sister Yamî are conceived the first human pair, parents of the whole following race; he is therefore, as is expressly stated in the hymns, the first who made his way to the skies, pointing out the road thither to all succeeding generations, and preparing a place for their reception; by the most natural transition, then, he becomes their king. It is in entire consistency with this, that in the Persian story, where he appears as Yima (later Jem-shid), he is made ruler of the golden age, and founder of the Paradise.*

Such are the main features of the Vedic religion: the considerable number of less prominent and important deities, personifications, apotheoses perhaps even, which also figure in it, it will not be worth while here to catalogue. Their nature and value is not in all cases clear, and their absence will not affect the general correctness of this picture.

We will close, then, here our consideration of the Vedas, expressing once more the hope that this presentation of the subject, however imperfect, may suffice to show their high importance to all students of antiquity, of civilization, of religions; as well as their absolute indispensability to those who would understand that portion of the history of our race which has been transacted within the limits of India.

Tübingen, May 1, 1852.

* See Roth, in the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenl. Gesellschaft,* vol. iv. for 1850: where this interpretation of the myths is first given, and they, in both their Indian and Persian form, are expressly handled.